

## 50 YEARS LATER: SOLDIER RECEIVES SILVER STAR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

Saint Petersburg, Fla. – May 31, 2021 – Fifty years after serving in Vietnam, US Army veteran John Kieffer was awarded the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in combat.

While friends and fellow veterans looked on, US Congressman Charlie Crist presented Kieffer the medal at a Memorial Day ceremony held at the War Veterans Memorial Park, located adjacent to the Bay Pines VA campus in Saint Petersburg.

On the day of the combat action, Kieffer was an infantry First Lieutenant serving as a rifle platoon leader with the 5th Infantry Division. His platoon, equipped with M-113 Armored Personnel Carriers, was assigned to provide infantry support to a tank company, equipped with M-48 “Patton” tanks, and operating just east of Khe Sanh and south of the DMZ in northern I Corps.

The congressman, whose office represented Kieffer with the Department of the Army (DA) in the matter, referenced the award’s citation, stating: “That day, LT Kieffer volunteered to lead a four man team to retrieve an armored vehicle, which had been abandoned while being used in heavy contact with North Vietnamese Army Regulars. During that recovery, LT Kieffer and his team came under a barrage of enemy small arms, RPG and automatic weapons fire. Rather than move to a secure location, LT Kieffer continued to deliver suppressive fire with his personal weapon until his team and the vehicle had successfully egressed to safer ground.”

In documentation provided to DA, Captain William Cranford, the tank company commander, wrote, “I awarded all 5 soldiers who participated in that action, including LT Kieffer, Bronze Stars w V (BSM w V), and told LT Kieffer that I would upgrade his BSM to a Silver Star. To date, LT Kieffer has never received any award for this action.”

In remarks to the group, Kieffer said: “Today, Memorial Day, I want to especially remember the young soldier, Terry Lee Gilpin, a tank crewman, who was killed on that tank, along with other crew who were wounded, before it was abandoned in the valley location where it was attacked.”

Kieffer joined the army upon graduation from high school and, 11 months later in May 1969 at the age of 19, was commissioned an infantry 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant through Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Benning, GA. He was sent to Vietnam later that year where he served as an infantry platoon leader for most of his tour. During his military service, which included active and reserve duty, Kieffer attained the rank of major.

The Silver Star is the third-highest military combat decoration that can be awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces.



May 31, 2021

War Veterans Memorial Park  
Saint Petersburg, FL

Major John Kieffer holds the  
Silver Star, which had just been  
presented to him by US  
Congressman Charlie Crist



Inscribed reverse side of medal



August 2, 1970

I Corps, Republic of Vietnam  
Somewhere along Highway QL9 south of  
the DMZ between Cam Lo and Khe Sanh

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant John Kieffer on one of his  
“mechanized” platoon’s four M-113  
Armored Personnel Carriers several hours  
prior to the combat action described in the  
Silver Star citation.

Kieffer was “in the field” as an infantry  
platoon leader with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 61<sup>st</sup>  
Infantry Regiment (Mech), 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup>  
Infantry Division from January to October  
1970.